



Why you SHOULD come and NOT come to Seminary

by Dr. Dianne Reistroffer

As I pondered what to tell you about seminary, I asked our current students to help me present the two sides of the seminary coin as a way to invite your discernment about the possibility of your coming to seminary. Specifically, I invited Louisville Seminary students to share with you reasons why you should *not* come to seminary and why you *should* come to seminary. Here are some of their reflections.

The top ten reasons for NOT coming to seminary (and this is not a David Letterman-type list).

1. *If you are radically, obstinately, 100% opposed to revealing personal struggles and vulnerabilities, engaging in questioning and uncertainty, and being honest about your expectations for seminary life.*

2. *If you just want some graduate degree to look good on your resume.*

If that's the case, pick a graduate degree program that will actually earn you some real money.

3. *If you cannot handle the financial sacrifice before, during, and after seminary.*

Going to seminary is expensive and requires a realistic assessment of one's current and future financial responsibilities, as well as an understanding of the lifestyle you and your family are embracing by entering Christian ministry. If at all possible, be debt-free or reduce your debt before coming to seminary.

4. *If you want to delay entry into the "real world."*

Seminary is not a retreat from the real world, as you will quickly discover in your encounters with members of this community, topics raised in classes, and with people you meet in Marriage and Family Therapy practicum, Clinical Pastoral Education, field education, and in other places.

5. *If you want to be part of a "Christian" crowd.*

Each Christian is unique and walks a uniquely different walk! You will never be "just one of the crowd" at LPTS!

6. *Because someone else, other than you and God, thinks you should become a minister.*

You need to be honest about whether you feel you are being called to seminary. Don't come just because your spouse or your parents or your Sunday School teacher think you would be a good minister. Others can affirm your call, but it needs to be your call and God's call upon your life!

7. *If you are hoping to master the mystery of God and have all of your questions answered.*

Don't expect seminary to be a place where all your beliefs will be confirmed. Don't expect everything and everyone to be perfect and wonderful. Seminary is a time of tremendous challenge and transformation and you

will be changed by the experience. If you don't want to be changed, stretched, challenged, and transformed, don't come to seminary, especially this one.

8. *If you are expecting to find your life's partner.*

While we have many wonderful persons here and some of us have found spouses and partners at LPTS, it should not be a primary reason for coming to seminary. You might be disappointed!

9. *If you think that the only way to live out the faith and be a good Christian is by working in the Church.*

Our Reformed tradition reminds us that there are vocations in the world as well as in the church that give glory to God and build up the Body of Christ. By coming to seminary, we are responding to a call, but we are not better Christians because we hope to work in the church; rather, we are seeking to be faithful and to be in partnership with other believers as together we seek to "do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with our God" (Micah 6:8).

10. *If you cannot deal with differences and beliefs and opinions that vary with your own.*



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Louisville Seminary is a diverse community where you can expect to encounter differences in race, ethnicity, age, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, class, life-work experiences, education, faith tradition, and theology. We strive to respect one another and to be open and not closed to differences among us.

And the top ten reasons FOR coming to seminary, especially Louisville Presbyterian Theological Seminary.

1. *The daily encounter with an exciting learning community led by a great faculty.*

Our faculty are well-versed in what they teach, and they are loving and caring individuals. The faculty not only “talk the talk” but each is a living example to students of how to “walk the walk.”

2. *It’s a safe place to struggle with tough issues of faith – picking apart those safe, comfortable, “right” answers and trusting God to lead you, with the help of professors and other students, through that struggle.*
3. *To be faithful and honor God’s call to ministry; to answer God’s call within your heart and to search for the direction God takes you within that call.*

Put another way, you should come to seminary if you are tired of trying to outrun the “Hound of Heaven.”

4. *To explore your faith and its heritage, and the interconnection and interdependence of all of God’s creation.*

Learning to love God with your mind and growing in your intellectual knowledge of the Bible, theology, church history, ethics, ministry, coun-

seling, and practical theology will be one of the most exhilarating and, at times, unsettling experiences of your life.

5. *To grow in spiritual ways you never imagined.*
While in seminary, the opportunities for individual prayer, prayer in class, community worship, courses in spirituality, spiritual direction, and participation in a variety of spiritual and worship traditions are unparalleled. You will pray as you have never prayed before, and you will experience God’s love and grace in fresh and powerful ways.
6. *Because you understand Paul’s sense of urgency when he declared, “I am under compulsion; for woe is me if I do not preach the Gospel” (1 Cor. 9:16).*
7. *To understand what it means to be a counselor or a pastor by “trying on the role.”*

Louisville Seminary takes seriously both the study and the practice of ministry, whether that’s in marriage and family therapy, or in congregational leadership. If you want lots of hours of supervised practice of your developing skills and abilities as a therapist or a pastor, this is the place to come! You will learn to reflect thoughtfully and theologically about the practice of ministry!

8. *If you think our world still needs a prophetic voice, and you want to know how to make your theology and ministry relevant to the world at large.*

If God is calling you to change the world, to be a doer of the Word, to work for peace and justice in our

world, come to LPTS. Your seminary education, your life in this community and in Louisville, will lay an important foundation for a prophetic ministry, and you will be welcomed by many groups and organizations on campus and in the city involved in awareness-building, advocacy, and activism on behalf of the “least of these”.

9. *If you wish to encounter God in the classroom and in study time pouring over books.*
As a recent graduate put it, “there were times in class when we silently sat and reflected on the goodness of God.” Even in the challenge and changes of seminary, you will come to “learn that God is to be trusted even in deep waters.”
10. *If you love God and you love God’s people.*

You are to be commended for even considering seminary because that in and of itself says that you are concerned about people whose spiritual lives will be entrusted to you. Just as you would not attempt to perform surgery on someone without proper medical training, so you should not consider pastoring or counseling without the best theological education. A seminary education will give you the confidence needed to enter the lives of others and impact their lives in positive ways.

Whether it’s with your classmates, in field education settings, CPE, or the counseling room, you will learn to be with hurting people, to enter their pain and be present with them, and to be God’s person in those difficult and life-changing times.

Dear friends, do you hear in any of these reasons, echoes of your own call to seminary? We pray that God may bless your discernment process and your time with us, now and hopefully in the future.

For additional articles on discerning a call to ministry or seminary life download back issues of *Futures* at www.lpts.edu/admissions.

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